

AT THE CENTER

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CHRIST AT THE CENTER OF SPECIAL KIDS

Artwork by Resa Smith



A letter from our executive director.

The Best! Those two words have not been heard much during 2020, if at all. The disruption of COVID-19 has affected everyone this year in some fashion or another. Sadly some have perished while virtually everyone has had their lives radically changed in ways we could have never imagined. Nevertheless, we have carried on and responded to the challenge. On March 17, our Board of Directors and team leadership decided to close the Special Kids campus. We pivoted and began to care for our families virtually through daily prayers, devotions, and classes to engage the children.

Our focus has been on the safety of our team members and patients. During our closure, we prayed and worked diligently to prepare for the re-opening of the campus. We provided teletherapy services for some of our patients. We were blessed to re-open the campus in mid-May and slowly increase services week by week, maintaining health and safety protocols for everyone. It has been a tremendous challenge trying to navigate COVID quarantines among team members and patients. We have had several closures and team member quarantines since re-opening.

While the situation has not been the best, I have witnessed the best come out of our Board Directors, our leaders and team members, and the patients and their families. All involved have followed our health and safety protocols and have kept each other safe. I am also thankful for our community of supporters who have walked closely with us each step of the way. As we close out 2020, we are setting priorities for 2021 and preparing for more uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the uncertainty we are focusing on prayer, keeping our mission at the forefront of our activities, and trusting Jesus for the best. Jesus is the best and He will give us the best.

Chris Truelove
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." - Proverbs 3:5-6

together

Meet our featured child.

The name Lourdess has been recognized across the Special Kids campus long before the six-year-old was selected as the newest Special Kids “featured child”. The simple mention of her name, inspired by images of royalty, inevitably brings a smile to anyone’s face. With her smile, her laugh, her love of jokes and innate charm, Lourdess is at home in the spotlight.

Her journey to “fame” dates back to 2014. Born with an intense need for up-close care, her parents Alicia and Hamlett were soon introduced to what Special Kids could provide. Through daily treatment in state-of-the-art physical, occupational and feeding therapy programs, Lourdess gained notoriety for her remarkable resolve as she passed milestone after milestone.

Lourdess’s biggest fan, her mother, says her daughter is the epitome of a “special kid”; announcing that as of November she no longer needs a feeding tube and will soon have it removed.

More from the Nedd family can be heard on the “Featured Child” episode of “His Children”, a Special Kids podcast, available on Spotify, iTunes and specialkidstn.com.

“No matter the location of your journey, remember to keep the faith... Surround your family with loving, supportive people,” says Alicia, agreeing that her daughter is the perfect fit for the “featured child” honor. “We honestly don’t think she understands her influence yet... Or maybe she is just too humble to show it.”

Lourdess’s popularity expands far past her exposure at Special Kids. Her fame was most recently exemplified as she appeared for several photo opportunities with teams at the 2020 Special Kids Fall Golf Classic. The young celebrity can be found most frequently on her own YouTube page managed by her family. “The Daily Nedd’s” showcases her adventures while her day-to-day exploits are chronicled on her Instagram page, “Empress Lourdess”. Adding to her influence, Alicia says her daughter will soon serve as a model for Billy’s Footwear, including their toddler-designed sneakers.



Photo credit: Shelby Fannin Photography



His Children Podcast

There’s plenty to talk about when it comes to the newest outreach tool for Special Kids. *His Children*, a podcast series produced in-house by the non-profit’s marketing team, has picked up hundreds of listeners since debuting in 2019. Much like the creative work put together by other teams across campus, the creation of each episode begins with a question: “What helps our families most?”

As podcast host and Special Kids Marketing Specialist Jake Wilbanks puts it, “Families can feel like they’re part of a conversation that’s directly addressed to them.” Topics of conversation cover campaigns and events as well as emotions parents and caretakers go through year-round. Each episode of *His Children* ranges from 20 to 30 minutes in length and can be found on Spotify, iTunes, or specialkidstn.com.

faith

Stories of hope and healing.

A year-end fundraising campaign has already earned its namesake in the eyes of those organizing and contributing to the 2020 Special Kids Hope Drive. By the start of the new year, development team leaders hope to have reached their goal of raising \$400,000 to benefit families in 2021 and beyond.

While ambitious, the largest year-end fundraising goal ever set by Special Kids was fittingly motivated by the generosity of early commitments to the campaign. Those promises included a \$200,000 matching donation from John D. Floyd, a long-time supporter of the local work happening at Special Kids. Since the Hope Drive launched in October, organizers have used every available outlet to spread the word and encourage others to make their own gift. Email campaigns, social posts, text messages, phone calls and letters have become some of the best tools to help spread the word.

While the Hope Drive takes place during a tumultuous year for many financially, the development team at Special Kids has been in constant awe based on how supporters have stepped up to show their faith in this mission through other fundraising events and projects impacted by COVID-19. As Special Kids Community Relations Specialist Kelly Sharp puts it, “2020 has been such a unique year with so many challenges, but it’s also been such a special year to see how God has really carried us through it all. I’ve been blown away by the support we’ve received.”

When it came to selecting a theme to motivate the generosity of its donor base, fundraising leaders didn’t have to look far for inspiration. The campaign carried with it the theme of “stories”; using pictures and testimonies from past and present Special Kids families to inspire what the future of the mission could be.

Special Kids parent Kandra Benton was among the many families providing their own words to inspire donors to make an impact. Her words, addressing how the trained specialists on campus treated her daughter, speak directly to what each gift has the ability to impact: “Because of Jesus, we have hope for today and tomorrow... Special Kids lives that message by loving and serving children and families that society often overlooks. They see my daughter as she is - made in the image of Jesus. The team at Special Kids serve as the hands and feet of Jesus - bringing hope.”

As of early December donors have helped reach **75%** of the Special Kids Hope Drive goal of \$400,000, including more than \$30,000 raised on “Giving Tuesday”. Visit www.specialkidstn.com to give.



Photo credit: Shelby Fannin Photography



Photo courtesy of Kandra Benton



Photo credit: Kim Linville Photography

The 2020 Special Kids Hope Drive will accept donations through December 31, 2020. Visit www.specialkidstn.com to find out how you can make a gift today to this campaign as well as other year-round giving opportunities.

10th Annual Special Kids Race

"I started thinking about the kids, the amazing staff, and the hundreds of volunteers and for some reason, the phrase 'dream big' came to mind... Why can't 2021 be our biggest and best year?" - Race Director, Charlie Apigian

Planning for the 2021 Special Kids Race, the 10th annual event of the non-profit's biggest fundraiser, provides an interesting perspective for organizers behind the event. Gathering together on March 7, 2020 with more than 3,000 people for this year's race was, for many, the last large gathering before the precautions of the COVID-19 pandemic went into effect. Now more than eight months later going from a handful of cases in the entire state of Tennessee to nearly 17,000 confirmed cases just in Rutherford County, organizers are cautiously optimistic for what lies ahead.

"The hardest part is the unknown," according to Race Director Charlie Apigian. The long-time volunteer that's helped with the Special Kids Race since its first year says they're moving forward with every intention of having the race as an in-person event. Multiple contingency plans have already been submitted to the city of Murfreesboro, including a "normal" layout with 15K, 10K, 5K and "Fun Run" distances intact as well as a version of the race separating start times by the hour; making sure runners and walkers are given the opportunity to stay socially distanced.

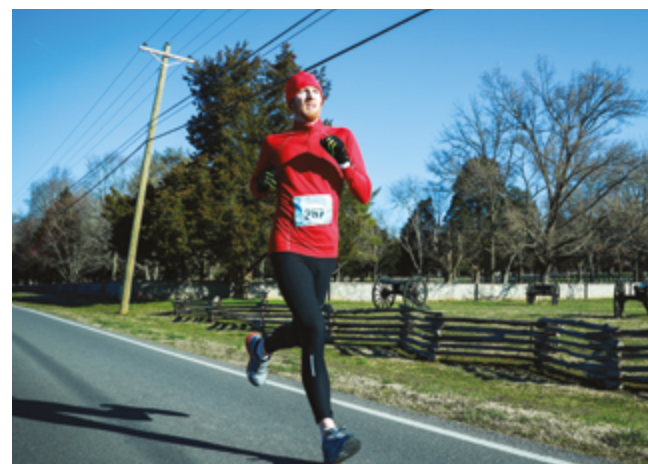
To Apigian, his vision for the race and its theme was clear despite what fears and questions may surround the event. "I started thinking about the kids, the amazing staff, and the hundreds of volunteers and for some reason, the phrase 'dream big' came to mind... Why can't 2021 be our biggest and best year? We will do everything in our power to make sure that we put on the best possible event in the safest manner... We want to make sure that we do what is best for our community and for Special Kids."

Visit www.specialkidsrace.org for all the details!

dream



Race Photos courtesy of We Run Huntsville



Go the extra mile!

Want to go the extra mile for the kids? Join "Impact Special Kids" and make a lasting difference.

What is "Impact Special Kids"? Impact Special Kids is a peer-to-peer fundraising program that gives you the tools you need to reach your fundraising goal for the kids. You set your own goal, receive your online fundraising page, and share with friends. It's that easy. Every dollar raised goes towards offering our services to all of the kids, not one child in particular.

How do I join Impact Special Kids? You have the option to join Impact Special Kids when you choose "yes" for fundraising during the registration process for the race. We will send you a link to create a team, set a goal, and get your friends involved.

Learn more about the race including race distances, virtual options, and fundraising opportunities by visiting:
www.specialkidsrace.org





Fall Golf Tournament

"I've learned never to underestimate the heart of people in Rutherford County..."
- Director of Development, Stephanie Folkmann

More than 30 participating teams at the second annual Special Kids Fall Golf Classic enjoyed a beautiful afternoon as they played "fore" the kids in another critical fundraising event for the future of the local non-profit. Led by the organization of Event Specialist, Rachel Braziel and hosted by [Cedar Crest Golf Course](#) in North Rutherford County, the tournament raised more than \$48,000 for families seeking nursing and therapy services from Special Kids.

Like the spring golf event, players were asked to adhere to "social distancing" guidelines as well as other recommendations based on health standards set forth by the CDC and local officials. Boxed lunches were provided by event sponsor [Jimmy John's](#), while representatives from Cedar Crest were more than accommodating when it came to providing a quick and easy turn-around for the tournament's re-scheduled "shotgun start".

Organizers, like Special Kids Director of Development Stephanie Folkmann, say they've been surprised and humbled by the flexibility of all those involved: "I've learned never to underestimate the heart of people in Rutherford County..."

They've shown such willingness to work with us through the restrictions and modifications we've had to make to our events and help us raise even more money than we expected!" Among the several teams playing was none other than former Special Kids patient James Ayer, who played with his father Kent. Both he and his wife Amy serve on the Special Kids Endowment Board and have been an active part of the organization since their son arrived on campus in 2012. James was born with a rare disorder called hemifacial microsomia, without an ear or hearing on his right side along and no jaw to help him swallow.

James received feeding, physical, occupational and speech therapies at Special Kids until 2017. Now 8 years old, James made six of his putts in the fall classic... quickly picking up on one of his dad's favorite hobbies. "Playing with James was extremely special..." Kent said, "His only disappointment was that he couldn't believe finishing under 11 didn't win. He was hoping for a 1st place trophy!" Thanks to the generosity of sponsors, supporters, and his fellow golfer, he'll have plenty more opportunities to hone his swing in the coming years.

Virtual Banquet Recap

Year after year, the evening of the Special Kids Banquet marks one night the non-profit can gather with hundreds of supporters that make its everyday work possible. Yet in 2020, a year already known for setting unusual precedents, the fundraiser went semi-virtual with a drive-thru dinner seamlessly organized by long-time sponsor [Chick-fil-A of Murfreesboro](#) and a virtual program broadcasted from [Belle Aire Baptist](#), less than three miles from campus.

The program featured a local speaker, Lee Golden, PharmD Chief Clinical Officer of Twelvestone Health Partners, along with Special Kids program directors, Cameron Campbell and Stephanie Gannar. As in years past, Dawn May, local radio host for "Dawn & Steve in the Morning" on Moody Radio 91.7 emceed the event and helped keep the show on track.

That audience, similar to participants of many other fundraising efforts, enjoyed the first-ever Special Kids Virtual Banquet from home. Event Specialist Rachel Braziel said it was the unknown that scared her the most in planning for the online event. "My greatest fear was that something out of our control would happen... In the end, most of the things we spent hours worrying about ended up working out totally fine especially thanks to the Belle Aire Baptist production team that made the entire event possible."

Continuing his own support of the mission at Special Kids, Lee Golden shared his testimony in a timely, inspiring message of finding peace in adversity. "It definitely isn't the same when you don't have the ability to read the faces of those that are listening to you..." Golden underwent months of intense physical therapy as part of his recovery from polyneuropathy, a condition he was suddenly affected by beginning in 2016. Now, his experience has a direct application for families going through similar trials of uncertainty. "When you endure these tough circumstances, be prepared to view them as some of the best opportunities you will have to serve others, and glorify God."

Braziel says the response from the community, much like past years, was "overwhelmingly positive" especially given the change in format. "While there's nothing like seeing people face to face, the idea of a virtual banquet is something we know we can do again if the opportunity or need arises." In all with more than 480 tickets sold, the online event raised over \$116,000 for Special Kids.

"When you endure these tough circumstances, be prepared to view them as some of the best opportunities you will have to serve others, and glorify God." - Banquet Speaker, Lee Golden





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Our mission is to serve Jesus Christ
by caring for His children.